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From Imperial Recordkeeping To Digital Archival Governance: Institutional Continuity, Documentary Heritage, And Fragilities In

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This article examines the institutional, administrative, material, and technological transformation of Turkish Cypriot archival practice from Ottoman rule to the period of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Drawing on Gokhan Sengor's master's thesis Ottoman to Present-Day Turkish Cypriot Archival Practice, the article re-theorizes the thesis material through contemporary archival science, records management, diplomatics, provenance, original order, the records life cycle, the records continuum, and digital archival governance. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative historical-documentary design. It analyses Ottoman-era sharia court registers, correspondence offices, registers, and waqf-related documentation; the British colonial registry system, court files, official gazettes, general orders, and administrative correspondence practices; post-1960 transitional administrations and institutional fragmentation; and the establishment, collections, legislation, staff training, preservation challenges, and early digitization initiatives of the National Archives and Research Department. The findings indicate that Turkish Cypriot archival practice is not merely a technical field concerned with the storage of documents, but a strategic memory regime closely related to sovereignty, institutional memory, the rule of law, cultural heritage, identity continuity, and administrative accountability. The article argues that the central problem lies in the absence of an integrated archival governance architecture extending from records creation to archival appraisal, from preservation environments to access policies, and from public information systems to secure electronic records. Consequently, the article proposes a seven-layer model of archival governance for Turkish Cypriot archival practice and argues that the National Archives should be repositioned not as a passive repository, but as a central information institution that sets standards, audits agencies, trains staff, preserves documentary heritage, and ensures access from the earliest stages of the records life cycle.

Keywords: Turkish Cypriot archival practice, National Archives, records management, archival governance, sharia court registers, digital archives

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